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Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/54601429.

Rating:
Mature

Archive Warning:
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Category:
M/M

Fandom:
Masters of the Air (TV 2024)

Relationship:
Harry Crosby/Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal

Characters:
Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal, Harry Crosby

Additional Tags:
Mentions Of Infidelity, POV Second Person, Secret Relationship, Angst

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2024-03-20 Words: 1,773 Chapters: 1/1

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by ecoustsaintmein

Summary

You think you know how Eve must have felt when she held the apple in her palm, red and tempting.

Go on, take a bite, the serpent says.

It won't hurt anyone.

In scenery I like flat country.
In life I don't like much to happen.

In personalities I like mild colorless people.
And in colors I prefer gray and brown.

My wife, a vivid girl from the mountains,
says, "Then why did you choose me?"

Mildly I lower my brown eyes—
there are so many things admirable people do not understand.

- Passing Remark, by William Stafford (1968)

It's never been in your nature to covet. To pine for something so hard you feel your heart would burst. To go after something so far beyond your reach, to have something beyond your means. Even when you think you do, you've learnt to hide them under your nervous laughter, and you lace it with drink. It only breaks when you're exhausted beyond belief, in the days of preparation before D-Day.

It only breaks when you found out that he's gone MIA, when you've laid it thick on that incompetent officer in the mess hall instead – to redirect your anger, your frustration, your *fear*.

And *yet*—you've probably been spending too much time in his atmosphere that his exuberance and enthusiasm has affected you, too.

Like Icarus reaching for the sun.

He *is* your sun.

And you would have been content just to continue orbiting him, keep your distance, admiring from afar – because oh, he's so brilliant and bright and beautiful, and he's everything that you're not.

Everything you will never be.

And you've never been the most analytical of navigators. Half the time you think you manage to land safely due to luck, making rash decisions on the go based on pure instinct and guesswork. Every victory is a fluke, and every fort that fell had been your fault.

But you can't help but analyse your relationship with him, how it came to be, and your mind freezes, static – like the scratchy sound of a record player reaching its end – because it hadn't really made sense, even until now.

Even *now,* at this very moment, when he's lying in your unmade bed, looking up at you like you're *his* sun. With those eyes— wide and dazzling and *trusting,* in the half-light of your bedroom, clothes from last night strewn haphazardly across the floor. Your gut twists with a rush of guilt and excitement and everything forbidden, because he's meant to be God ascendant, like Apollo. And you're just a greying old believer, ardently worshipping at his altar.

You watch him watch you, watch as his chest rises and falls with each breath he takes. The bruises that bloom on his skin from your touch. Your mouth. You've pressed kisses and whispered fervent prayers onto his skin, but you know that you've had a hand in destroying him, this perfect, marbled God with sparkling, earnest, vivid blue eyes.

Oh, but he's so gorgeous like this. So gorgeous for you. The delectable swell of him, the mouthwatering taste of him.

And you think you know how Eve must have felt when she held the apple in her palm, red and tempting.

Go on, take a bite, the serpent says.

It won't hurt anyone.

You've never really known desire, not like this. You've never really known *life*, not until you've flown countless deathly missions and understanding that you can lose anyone at any given time, that you want to *live.* But you've never really known this, especially not until you met him. *Know* him.

And you know this shouldn't have worked. You know that he shouldn't have *seen* you beyond just another face, another bumbling navigator at Thorpe Abbotts. But you know that he's been watching you, and he *watches* you whenever you're in a room together. At the mess hall, at the bar, even at interrogation with Colonel Jeffrey in the room. By your bedside, you're half-awake and he's staring like he's worried about you. Eyes locked on you like a hawk awaiting its prey, hoping, hoping that *this is the time* you'll get close enough to him.

Hoping that you'll dare to fly— with the wings that he's gifted you, to reach him halfway.

Hoping that you'll give in.

You've always managed to control your impulses, though the drink gets to you sometimes. You've always thought that you could rein them in. You control them by letting loose somewhere else, like when you chase after Sandra because you think you could get away with it, or when you cycle for miles and miles to nowhere at all, and your muscles burn deliciously at the end of the ride.

Like penance for your sins.

For even daring to think that you could have him.

Go on, take a bite.

It won't hurt anyone.

He only started calling you at night after the war, during the Nuremberg trials. A moment of catharsis. He said he wanted to hear your voice, because the adrenaline's still pumping in his veins and your voice is the only thing that can sooth him. Calm him. On a night after particularly tough, disturbing evidence being presented in court while interrogating Goering, it was a hard, choking sound that you hear, muffled through the phone receiver. As if he was trying to hide his tears.

"Let it out," you told him. *"Let it all out, Rosie,"* you'd said, like you're the one who has always been stronger and not the other way around. He cries too, this young God, and sometimes you forget how truly

young he is. He's wiser beyond his years, even if he's only two years older, and that realization scares you.

Sometimes you wonder if he's doing this purposely as an intervention for *you* – so that you stay alert, you stay sober, you stay *faithful.* So that you have a purpose, someone to truly care about rather than letting the world crash and burn all around you.

You see him in the news. You see the photographs from Nuremberg, from the trial and from the wedding, all suited up and made perfect like an invincible prince, like he's never phoned you at three a.m. last night crying, asking you to promise him that everything will be okay.

You imagine the colours filtering through the grainy black-and-white of the photographs. You imagine the sparkling blue of his eyes. The rosy flush of his cheeks. It is strange to see him in his civvies, sans the sheepskin jacket or the crisply pressed uniform that makes him look like a dashing officer out of Hollywood.

You feel the blood rise within you, an unwitting growl escaping your lips. You want to rip those civilian clothes off from his body with your teeth. You want to use your hands and ruin him, hear him stutter your name under your touch.

The serpent slithers around your heart and coils it so tight you couldn't breathe.

Go on, take a bite, he says.

You don't even remember how it began, in the end. It could have been a year, five, ten years after you'd first met.

It'd been one of those cases he'd prosecuted, that he'd wanted to forget. One of those crimes so sick that he'd wanted to erase from his conscience.

He phoned you again that night, saying that he got fed up with phone calls and wanted to talk to you in person.

'Let's meet up,' he'd said.

But it's in the way that he's said it – and you've known him long

enough by now to understand that there's something else he wanted – *no, needed* – just by listening to the tone of his voice. You catch yourself, thinking, *am I reading too much into this?*

Go on, take a bite. It won't hurt anyone.

He's gifted you the wings.

All you need to do is fly.

So you did.

You meet in a motel somewhere between Boston and New York.

The key was warm between your fingers. You felt the burn of his stare on his skin, intently studying you while you go through the mundane motions of opening the door. The satisfying click of an opened lock ringing as loud as the thumping beats of your treacherous heart. You stepped into the darkness of the room, before he followed you in and switched on the lights. The door clicked shut behind you.

He stood tall and powerful, between you and the door, trapped in his snare. Quietly gauging your reaction.

It had been hard for him as it had been hard for you, to mask your emotions in that very moment. A hesitant smile on the corner of his lips. The sound of heartbeats rushing in your ears.

It's never been in your nature to covet. To go after something so far beyond your reach, to have something beyond your means.

He's a God and he could easily strike you with thunder, strike you with his fists and leave you for dead.

And yet—

--you let him bury himself inside of you, filling you up to the brim and you'll never know hunger again. You watched your slim fingers clutching vainly at his curls, *oh,* those *glorious* curls.

--you let him hush your little moans and swallowed your kisses, as you move together in synchrony-- like you're equals.

--you live, you die.

You live again.

In the morning sunlight, he seems peaceful. You've never thought you'd ever be given privilege to see him like this. To witness the rise and fall of his chest as he breathes; the flutter of his eyelashes against his cheeks as he sleeps; the crimson flush of his skin against the pale of his body.

"You're still here," he mumbles.

"I am," you nod.

"I thought it was a dream."

You lift his face with his thumb and forefinger, gently, delicately, and kisses him. He responds by tracing the lines around your eyes, the tip of your nose, the cleft of your chin. You take a sharp breath.

"Heaven resides in every line of your body," you whisper, *"—and I would readily worship you as you worship your God."*

I don't want to be worshipped, he says. *I want to be loved.*

You're not afraid to fly too close to the sun.

You're not afraid to fall. You're not afraid to burn.

So you love him by whispering prayers into his skin, and when words aren't enough, you use your hands – and even when your touch isn't enough, you use your lips. You're not ashamed of how much you want to devour him, or be devoured by him.

And you remember Eve, who ruined it for everyone else, with the apple in her hand. Who could blame her?

So you bend your head and take a bite.

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